**GLOCOM Project (Meher)**

(Illegal immigration from different African countries to Italy and south Europe, through the Tunisian coasts):

The illegal immigration from the southern parts of the Mediterranean to the south European countries has been a very serious issue for decades. The problem is structural and multi-faceted, and has been the center of heated and repeated discussions and negotiations between the different involved entities (countries and international organizations).

Because of the geographical location of Tunisia, it has always been a favorite getaway spot and passageway for illegal immigrants from most countries in Africa. The last decade witnessed a worsening of the entire humanitarian and security conditions in the western part of the Mediterranean. Numbers of illegal immigrants trying to join the promised land surged.

Political instability, economic and social hardships in the countries of origin are behind the complications. Furthermore, the challenging conditions in Tunisia and the general atmosphere in the country, especially after the revolution, was a factor in the rise of this dilemma.

Coupled with the internal struggles of the southern European countries, and the troubles caused by the influx of the immigrants, Italy and the other concerned EU countries increased their efforts to combat and stop the immigration, and find solutions in coordination with Tunisia or without. The latter faced pressure and tensions from the Northern counterparts on every occasion, and had several direct high-level meetings regarding the matter.

For the European countries, there are thousands of “unwanted” aliens arriving to their shores, asking for humanitarian aid and support. That had its toll on their economic conditions, and caused social tensions and problems among the citizens of the arrival points, and elsewhere up North where the illegal immigrants usually try to flee. Various cultural aspects and differences resulted in grave security incidents. All of these elements, along with the propagation of the far-right wing and populist political ideologies in southern Europe (partly in response to this crisis, but not entirely), contrived severe and harsh response from certain European countries towards the boats carrying the illegal immigrants. Thus, the connotation of boats of death across the Mediterranean.

On the Tunisian side, the successive weakened governments faced a lot of crucial internal issues and had countless socio-economic priorities to deal with on a constant basis. The flux of illegal immigrants from neighboring countries and from sub–Saharan Africa, already caused heavy damage to the economic and social conditions within the country. The illegal immigration added another layer of difficulty, due to the fact that European countries are using the problem as a leveraging point and card during other negotiations with Tunisia concerning aid and support to the national economy.

Additionally, Tunisia, which doesn’t have the means or tools to stop the scourge, is asked to police its southern borders, and also protect and patrol the sea.

Many aspects of the issue caused direct and indirect conflicts between Tunisia and its European partners, resulting in a complicated socio-economic situation on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The role of the humanitarian and international entities has been somewhat varied. Some played a key role in giving meaningful assistance and support to Tunisia, and to the illegal immigrants. But others with proper means and resources failed to rise to the occasion.

The issue is not going to disappear soon, and its ramifications would be deepened with the political changes in all countries and the heightened global challenges.